

THE FORMATION OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR BORDERGUARD.

Immediately after the second World War Hungary had no Army. In the summer of 1945 the temporary National Government began to organize the first military units, which were for the most part National Defence Border Patrol units. The professional duty of the members of such units was the guarding of the nation's borders.

Previous to World War II. Hungary had Border Patrol units and in the post war years it seemed logical to continue this practice.

Toward the end of 1947 and early in 1948 governmental power was seized by the Communists, consequently reenforced border-patrol strenght became a necessity. At this time within the frame-work of the National Police Force the so called National Defence Section was organized and entrusted with the most important interior special constable duties, whose sphere of activity included inspection of the border traffic as well.

During the course of 1948 Yugoslavia separated itself from the Soviet Block. Now, reenforcement of the Border-Patrol strenght became decisively important. So far the political passivity of the border-guards made it possible for the now incriminated titolist politicians of Hungary to flee to Yugoslavia.\* Similarly between 1945 and 1948 rightist politicians who were in danger of liquidation fled westward, daily. It became increasingly clear to the Communist regime in power that the Border-Patrol units are almost to one man unreliable in the service of

\*General Palfy Commr. in Chief of the Army and Borderpatrol was one of the titolsts and was for this executed. See, Rajk-case.)

(2)

the regime's interests. Just as the members of the Police Force were unreliable at the time, as many among them received their training during the Horthy-regime. Nothing but the so called National Defence Section within the frame-work of the National Police proved altogether reliable for the purposes of the Communist government. Therefore the Government set out to gradually replace the men in the Border-patrol units with definitely reliable and more drastically energetic men.

This may explain why the Traffic Inspection Points, or Exit and Entrance Stations on the border, were the first ones to be placed directly under the direction of the ~~State Defence~~ Section. (1948.)

When in 1949 the State Defence Section apparatus was fully developed in the frame work of the National Police it was separated from the Police Force and made independent of the Interior Ministry, under the name of State Defence Authority. This meant its establishment as an independent police organ. On the agenda of this organ were State security tasks, such as the execution of so called defensive duties, the gathering of information in the country's interior and in foreign countries and on the other hand the guarding of the nation's borders.

Thus in the year 1949 the National Border-patrol units were in their entirety replaced by the border-guard units of the State Defence Authority. This organizational move brought another and not in the least unimportant advantage to the government. According to the peace-treaty Hungary's military strenght was to be limited to 65,000 men. The 25,000 strenght of the State Defence Authority's borderguard units did not figure in the military strenght of the nation.

(3)

During the course of 1949 and 1950 the guarding of the nation's borders was exclusively in the hands of professional State-Def. Authority men appointed for this duty. An effort was made to increase the number of the men in these border-guard units, and they began to recruit men to the Border-guard. Political reliability was one of the most important requirements in the recruit, and by this was meant at the time the greatest possible loyalty to the Soviet Union. Consequently, the first recruits were either Party members or came from the ranks of recently returning Hungarian PW-s, who have merited some sort of distinction for themselves in the U.S.S.R. Whether they had previous training or not was not important, because they were to be trained in the border-guard units. These men enjoyed then the lot of the politically and materially privileged in the country.

But the exceptionally good pay for these State Defence Authority men was found to be a great financial burden to the government. From 1951 on, the Communist regime tried gradually to rid itself of this expense. The economic burdens of the 5-year plan with its heavy industrial and military investments, together with the economic sanction in effect on the part of the Western powers ripened the governmental decision that those members of the State Defence Authority's Border-guard units whose duty was the actual guarding of the border, should be replaced by young men of military age who were liable to conscription, and were drafted, subsequently.

Thus beginning with 1950 and in the year 1951 many of the State Defence Authority's appointed professional men were either discharged or transferred to other units, where

(4)

either as NCO-s or as officers they were given commanding or leading positions.

From 1951 on the Borderguard personnel consisted wholly of drafted enlisted men. Their tour of duty was 3 years and the only advantage they had over the other enlisted men in the Army was that their food rations were better. This however was not as great an advantage as were the physical and mental hardships involved in actual guard duty, a disadvantage.

In this way the regime rid itself of the financial burden placed upon it earlier, and at the same time, achieved maximum strenght in guard personnel. The whole re-organization was achieved on the basis of Soviet experience and practice.

Needless to say that the new situation brought with it the danger of passivity on the part of the borderguards' drafted enlisted men, who were not concerned with communist (Soviet) interests and did not see their borderguard duties in the light of these interests.

Duty on the border was a strain on the personnel physically and mentally and it was disadvantageous financially. Therefore the strictness of the military discipline became more and more far reaching and tight. On or off duty, the personnel was ceaselessly subject to supervision, an obligation not neglected by the commanders. The enlisted man was forbidden to leave the barracks or the territory of the particular outpost. He would get leave once yearly, but never on the more important holidays, for at such times the number of men on duty was usually increased. Action contrary to regulations infraction of discipline, or the least mistake while on duty was promptly punished. A borderguard was Court-martialed if found asleep on guard-duty or if an unpunished border-violation took

place while he was on duty. If found guilty, he was liable to serve several years in prison.

In 1953 Imre Nagy proclaimed the "new government program" and openly admitted to encroachments and violations of law by the State Defence Authority men. In the mind of the people and in the thought of some Party members the covert dissatisfaction with the actions of the State Defence Authority men increased. Presumably the government was influenced by this when in 1953 the State Defence Authority was denied its independence and both the Internal Security Police Force and the Border-guard was given jointly a Commander in Chief and placed under the authority of the Interior Ministry.

Simultaneously with these reorganizational changes the enlisted men in the Border-guard units saw changes in the ranks of their officers, as well. For the officers, special training in the field was made an increasingly important requirement. The officers who could not meet these requirements or did so only in part were given less important assignments or transferred to other organizations (to the Police, to Prisons, or to Government owned Co.-s). The vacancies were given to young Borderguard Officers who just then got out of officer's training school. These new men were better trained and had more education than their predecessors.

Beginning with 1953 an increasingly large number of the highschool graduates and men who had special training of some sort were drafted into the borderguards. This changed the situation again, to where now there were among the borderguard personnel a considerable number of men who did not agree with the politics of the communist regime. This circumstance did not weaken the

(6)

borderguard units, however, because each borderer knew that should he prove "disloyal" or be pronounced a "traitor" (should he have fled to Austria) his wife, or father or mother or brothers were to be penalized for his deed, with as much as a ten years' prison-term. This circumstance, of course, greatly increased the restive sense and dissatisfaction in the personnel and brought the feeling of being at the mercy of the government, resulting in the thought of active resistance. The events in Oct. 1956 proved this to be the case. In the most decisive hours, the units of the Borderguard either remained passive or sided with the revolutionaries.

The above mentioned situation is typical of how the communist government in Hungary used the citizens of that nation against their own will in the service of its own purposes, for years now.